



The Barnes Foundation: There's More to the Story

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There is an old adage that warns: “Never pick a fight with someone who buys his ink by the barrel.” Sadly, The Barnes Foundation finds itself at a disadvantage in the ongoing debate with The Philadelphia Inquirer.

The organization, on an almost weekly basis, is repeatedly forced to respond to numerous inaccuracies in Philadelphia Inquirer news reports, factual errors in opinion pieces, and even blatantly misleading headlines.

A great deal hinges on the outcome of our proposal to move our main collection to Philadelphia – including our ability to fulfill our educational mission and possibly our organization’s very existence. Given what is at stake here, The Philadelphia Inquirer owes it to its readers and the region to hold itself to the highest journalistic standards in ensuring that everything it prints is accurate and truthful.

The proposal to relocate our main collection has rightfully sparked a civic debate about the merits of the proposed move. But unbalanced news coverage combined with ill-informed opinion pieces only serve to cloud the issue, distort the truth, and hinder The Barnes Foundation’s ability to take the steps necessary to right its financial situation and move forward in a new and positive direction.

Such was the case with the Inquirer’s egregious twisting of three excerpted pieces under a heading “Art World Opposes Move.” The first piece gathered under that heading is the opinion of an art critic who confessed that in his thirty-year career, he visited The Barnes Foundation only once. I doubt that makes his opinion well informed. The second, a letter from the Association of Art Museum Directors in support of The Barnes commitment to the ethical standards of the museum field to not deaccession its collection makes absolutely no mention of gallery relocation. The third excerpt was from a freelance journalist whose opinion piece in the Wall Street Journal should have been condemned for its multiple misstatements and gratuitous insults. These hardly can be viewed as a representative sampling of opinion from the art world.

Similarly, Inquirer reporters and columnists continue to imply that The Barnes Foundation's Board of Trustees simply woke up one day and decided to move our main location to the Parkway. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Board spent many months debating a variety of options, including one similar to that outlined in the recent opinion piece "A Merion Option for The Barnes," which proposed the creation of a road from City Avenue to The Foundation. Such a road – which leads to our back gate -- already exists. In fact, we have attempted to utilize that road in the past to minimize traffic impacts on our neighbors. When we did so, we received a violation notice from Lower Merion Township.

That typifies our relationship with Lower Merion Township, which in recent years has grown so tenuous and strained that it is beyond repair. Every effort we make to improve our ability to operate is repeatedly rebuffed by township officials. For example, we are prohibited from having tour buses visit our organization while neighboring Episcopal Academy, Saint Joseph's University, Akiba Hebrew Academy, and the French International School face no such restrictions. Our efforts to make The Barnes' collections more accessible to local school children, by easing Township restrictions that limit our weekly visitors to 1,200 individuals per week were rejected by local officials.

And as recently as three years ago, the township even informed us of plans to ban senior citizens from arriving at The Foundation on school buses – a proposal they abandoned when we informed them such a move would be a form of age discrimination. This behavior – only the tip of the iceberg – is not indicative of a Township that wants to work with The Barnes Foundation or our leadership. Despite recent superficial protestations about the proposed move, Lower Merion Township Commissioner David Senseshein may have best summed up the ambivalence of the Township and neighbors about our location when he said "It is more important that the Barnes survive than it survive in our township."

It is time to allow The Barnes Foundation to move on. The lawsuits, accusations, and name-calling happened more than a decade ago, when The Barnes Foundation was under completely different leadership. Yet the media continues to rehash these stories, dredging up old grudges and helping to foster renewed hostilities. The Township and neighbors likewise seem intent on keeping these old grudges alive, although not one of our current board members or staff leadership was here to contribute to the woes of the past. This hostility only serves to damage The Barnes Foundation's mission and our ability to serve the public.

The motives and involvement of the Foundation's Board of Trustees in the operations of The Barnes' are repeatedly and unfairly questioned by the media. In reality, we have in place an experienced and professional board of trustees that has a demonstrated record of achievement and leadership. Stephanie Bell-Rose, a graduate of Harvard Law and the Kennedy School of Government, serves as president of The Goldman Sachs Foundation, one of the top 10 corporate foundations in the nation. Steve Harmelin, also a Harvard Law graduate, is the managing partner of Dilworth Paxson, created the Philadelphia Constitution Foundation, and serves as general counsel to the National Constitution Center. Dr. Jeff Donaldson, recently deceased, earned an international reputation as an educator and artist over the thirty years he served as dean of the art

department at Howard University. Judge Jacqueline Allen, a Lincoln alumnus, is a graduate of Temple University and a second term judge in the Court of Common Pleas.

The truth is, The Barnes Foundation has made enormous strides in recent years. Too often, this important progress is glossed over or discounted in media reports. Since Kimberly Camp, our executive director and CEO, arrived at the Foundation in 1998 we reduced a \$3.3 million deficit and instituted an annual budget process. The Foundation's finance office was professionalized to better account for expenses and to effectively track grant money, and we created the development office in 1999.

A small, but effective, development staff has created a membership program of over 1,300 members for corporations and individuals, and submitted grants to federal, state and private philanthropic organizations. In less than five years, we developed our programs, collections care and research work to vie for some of the most competitive grant programs in the nation. The results include grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Institute for Museums and Library Services, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, and the Pennsylvania Council for the Arts.

The Foundation has received \$100,000 from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for educational programs to plan effective collaborations which included the creation of a national education advisory committee, chaired by Dr. Jeff Donaldson. Aided by the work of that committee, our education department developed a K-12 program that now serves 6,000 children. Our adult education programs in horticulture and art and aesthetics have been improved to reflect Barnes' initial vision. Enrollment in the past five years has more than doubled. We have received Act 48 approval for K-12 teachers in PA to take our programs for continuing education hours for certification and instituted new teacher training programs. Support from an individual donor has provided us opportunity to proceed with evaluation of our courses by the American Council on Education so that students can receive college credit for attending our programs.

We now have Dr. Jacob Thomas, Ph.D. in botany as head of our arboretum. In the past few years the arboretum has gone through an amazing transformation to more closely approximate its beauty during Barnes' lifetime. The greenhouse, after years of poor maintenance, was razed and a new one erected in its place that serves our horticulture students and volunteers. We instituted a garden guides' program on public days staffed by volunteers and students that help our visitors understand that the arboretum is more than just window dressing to our art collection; the specimens there are noteworthy in their own right. We are starting the construction of a children's garden design by summer interns from area high schools and our garden staff.

Five years ago collections care was non-existent. Our executive director designed and implemented the Collection Assessment Project that has resulted in a full inventory, full conservation program, the creation of a collections database, with digital images, and curatorial research on 38 areas of the collection. We now have a team of people with exceptional experience and training who have crafted an exemplary program of collections care and management. This work has been fully funded from grants that include the J. Paul Getty Trust, the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Henry Luce Foundation, and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation,

just to name a few. In addition, 80% of our director's salary has been covered by CAP grant money for the past three years.

The results of this work are safety for our collections, better information for our teachers and students in the service of our educational mission, and publication opportunities. Our first serious offering will be a first-ever catalogue of our American Collections, for which we have already raised \$150,000. Our Curatorial Advisory Committee includes curators, scholars, and directors from national institutions including the Smithsonian Institution, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the University of Arizona, the University of Pennsylvania, and the Getty Research Institute. Our archival cataloguing project is being used as a model by other institutions as an exemplary process to ensure the safety of and access to important archival holdings. A recent grant of \$95,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities will further aid that work.

Every area of The Foundation's operations is far outperforming not only operations prior to Camp's arrival, but outpacing standards in the field. Our store last year grossed over \$500,000 in sales, and new products have been developed with little or no resources for national and international markets.

Everyone is entitled to their opinion, as long as those opinions are kept in the proper context. Readers look to the media for information on which to base opinions. I am not certain which is more alarming - that the Inquirer feels it can manipulate public opinion by manipulating the truth, or that the Inquirer has allowed itself to become a platform for those with an agenda to denigrate The Barnes.